Can a Christian be a Soldier?

Deut. 20:1-4 vs.

Preached in St. John's Church
3d and Reed Sts.
by
Rev. George A. Latimer
Saturday, April 27, 1861.

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Deut. 20: 1-4a. inclusive - "When thou goest out to batt
against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots,
and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them; for
the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out o
the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when ye are come nig
unto the battle, that the priest shall appear, and speak un
the people, and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye
approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not
your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be
ye terrified because of them: For the Lord your God is he
that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies,
to save you."

Creation was ushered in with
peace - the peace of God gave happiness and joy to the two
inhabitants of Eden. In a while, however, in a way beyond
our comprehension - infinitely mysterious - the enemy entered
thenceforward to wage an unceasing warfare against the
servants of the most High. Since that dark hour, this arch
rebel from the hosts of heaven, has not ceased to call forth all
the vile and desperate passions which he could invent -
anger, wrath, strife, sedition, conquest, hatred, wars,
malice, pride, and prejudice - such passions as these took
possession of breasts which were created to love and adore -
and every age of the world has witnessed their dire effects
in anarchy, confusion, war and bloodshed. Never did a
more terrible wrath rage among men than that of the

Romans of old. Nothing could stand before it – all went down like flax before the flame. Julius Caesar fought about fifty (50) battles; and it is computed that he slew one million, one hundred ninety-two thousands (1,192,000) of his enemies. If we add to that aggregate, the soldiers who perished on the side of Caesar, and the butchery of women and children in his wars, we have a total of nearly three millions (3,000,000) of immortal beings sacrificed on the altar of one man's ambition. Humanity recoils from this butchery and would gladly draw a veil over these terrible woes. And yet, what are they but a drop to the ocean, a spark to the sun, compared with the massacres of Rome, spread over eight or nine centuries of our bleeding world! Again, who does not recollect the atrocities of the first French Revolution – "legalized plunder, legislative butchery, the prostitution of a kingdom, fields drenched in human blood, and cities burned by human incendiaries, fill up the tremendous iniquity, bewilder the gazing world with astonishment, awaken the shouts of fiends, and cover heaven itself with a robe of sackcloth."? We make no attempt to depict the protracted horrors of that war. They extended to almost every Kingdom of Europe – they crossed to Africa, and occasioned the death of multitudes there – they visited Asia – they aimed, in a word, at the subjugation of the globe to the dictation of one man; and it may be enough to enumerate the results of a few of the battles of that period. At Austerlitz, 30,000 were slain – at Jena, 30,000 – At Eylau, 60,000 – at Borodino, 80,000 – at Lutzen, 30,000 – while in Russia, 300,000 French and perhaps 200,000 Russians, perished in 1812. The daily deaths during the campaign have been computed at 2,890; 20,230 died each week – 120 each hour – or two (2) every minute, for 173 successive days. Indeed, it

computed by some, that the wars of Napoleon cost the lo
of 4,000,000 of human beings". Such, dear friends,
the sad picture which war presents to some such deg
way over our loved country - and we say it with great
sorrow of heart, such has been in no little degree, the
condition which our beloved land presented to the wor
in the last great struggle. In reading the chapter, fro
which our text is taken - wherein Moses is giving to
the Children of Israel the laws to be observed in thei
warfare against their enemies - these two interestin
and important points arose in my mind, for conside
tion. But without further introduction we will en-
deavor to answer the question:

I. Is it consistent for a religious man to engage in
war - or in other words, "Can a Christian be a soldie

II. The sure source of success in all our engagements
with the enemy.

I. ~~Is it~~ consistent with a religious
man's profession to engage in war - or "Can a
Christian be a soldier?" And here at the outset, I am
met by this question - Does not the commandment
say "Thou shalt not kill"? - "Thou shalt do no murder":
Bishop Hopkins remarks:- "There may be blood shed
in a just and lawful war without the charge or
crime of murder. Indeed, we are commanded to
"follow peace with all men," and as much as lies in
us, and if possible, to "have peace with all men"
(Romans 12:18). But sometimes, through the ambition,
and turbulent spirits of others, through their politic
designs of picking unjust quarrels, it may be no longer
possible to maintain peace; and in this case, where
we have right and equity on our side, it is lawful
to wage war. I speak not now of private differences,

between person and person, but of public, between na-
tion and nation; in which case the supreme mag-
trate hath the power of making war and procla-
ing peace. There are some who decry this assertion, a
think it contrary to the temper of a Christian, who
a son of peace, to be a man of war. I confess there is
nothing that can justify war against another nati
but either one of three things:- 1. Necessary defence
against an unjust invasion - 2. Recovery of what is u
justly taken away; or 3. The punishing of some great
injury or wrong. But where the cause is just, th
manner in which we prosecute it is warrantable, t
authority which engageth us in it being rightly con-
stituted over us, I see nothing but that it is very fit,
when it is very necessary to take up arms, and in
a public war to right ourselves upon an injurious
enemy." Another eminent writer (I. Barrow, D. D.)
remarks, on the Sixth Commandment - " Of all good
gifts conferred upon us, none (according to the na-
tural and common esteem of men) is more precious
than life itself ---- God hath, therefore, reserved the
disposal of it entirely to himself, as his special pre-
rogative; neither he that hath it, nor any other per-
son, having absolutely any just power or right ove
it: no man can take away any man's life, but
by commission or license from God, reasonably pre
sumed to be granted to him: so may God (the ab-
solute King of the world) be supposed to have com-
mitted to lawful magistrates, as his vica-gerents
and officers, in His Name and behalf, upon reason
able cause, for preservation of public justice, peac
and order, in a lawful course of justice, to dispos
of men's lives, who have forfeited them to the law
('The magistrate,' saith St. Paul,' beareth not the

sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, an aven
to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.") God
hath not forbidden sovereigns (in case of necessity
and when amicable means will not prevail) to
maintain the safety or welfare of the societies in
trusted to their care, even by armed violence,
against such as wrongfully invade them, or an
wise harm them, and will not otherwise be in-
duced to forbear doing so; in which case the res
lution of such differences (inasmuch as they can
not be tried at any other bar, or composed by othe
means) is referred to God's arbitrement, Who is
the Lord of Hosts, the Sovereign Protector of right,
and Dispenser of success; the soldier, in a just
cause, being then God's minister and carrying a
tacit commission from Him." But to be a little
more particular - to illustrate with facts - let
us see what we can learn from the New Testa-
ment of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. -
Refer to Luke 3: 14 vv. and you will find among
those who came to John the Baptist for instruc-
tion, were soldiers, who with the rest, "demanded
of him, saying - And what shall we do?" He
did not bid them lay down their arms, or put
aside their commission. He did not preach to
them "fight no more, kill no man," but gives
them directions how they should demean them-
selves in their calling: which he would not
have done if he thought their calling itself unlaw
ful. He bids them "do no violence" - plunder,
rapine, or malicious mischief - "accuse no
man falsely, but be content with your wages",
or pay - Again we have a very remarkable in-
stance in Luke 7: 8 vv. - When our Saviour so

highly commended the centurion for his faith, & did not rebuke him for his profession, but extol him for taking the ground and argument of his faith from his military calling. And again, when Jesus was examined concerning His kingdom (John 18: 36 vs.), He answered, "My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight that I should not be delivered unto the Jews"; which clearly implies that although wars and fightings were no proper means to advance the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ, yet if the methods of His humiliation had permitted Him to assume the royal sceptre, His servants and followers might lawfully have sought to defend His claim of title - i. e. in spiritual matters, spiritual weapons are provided; but in earthly and temporal matters, when it becomes necessary, weapons of defence and offence are to be wielded for safety and protection. But to refer to one other instance from the Scripture; when God would call the Gentiles, and admit them into the Christian Church, who was selected from the Pagan world, as the first instance of this distinguished mercy, and by express appointment of Heaven, enrolled among the number of the faithful? It was Cornelius - a Roman soldier! And we have every reason to believe he retained his situation in the Roman army: at least, he was not commanded to relinquish it: nor is the occupation of a soldier anywhere condemned in the Scriptures, as absolutely sinful in itself. Who were Joshua - David - Jonathan but men whose names are held in everlasting remembrance? They spent most of their time

in military service while adorning the doctrine
God with piety. And since Christianity spread
among men, the army has not ceased to yield,
and even at this present day, yields its testimon
to the faith in the godly lives of soldiers. However
inconsistent war may be with the Gospel of Chris
and however unfavorable a camp may be for th
practice of piety, many illustrious believers hav
glorified God in both. Who can for a moment do
the piety of such a man as Captain Hedley Vica
of the British army, in the war in the Crime
[illegible]? His biography reveals a life in a
British regiment that will not readily find a
parallel in Christian records. It was brief, bu
it was brilliant. The growth of grace and deeds
of usefulness comprehended in its one decade of
years, rarely characterize long lives of Christian
profession and activity. Look again, at another
of these Christian warriors in the late Indian
war - Sir Henry Havelock, like the centurion
referred to in the 10th Chapter of the Acts of
the Apostles was, indeed a "devout man," and
one that prayed to God always - often turning
the field of battle into house of prayer - and
so well designated by Lord Hardinge, "Every
inch a soldier and every inch a Christian."

We nowhere read in Scrip
ture that it is unlawful to be a soldier, or tha
they must abandon the business in order t
be true penitents. It is lawful to defend one's pe
one's family or one's country, and it is lawful
to be a soldier. Man, everywhere, in all profession
should be a Christian - not in name only but in
deed and in truth - and then he will do honor
to his profession, and his profession, if it is

not in direct violation of the law of God, wil
honorable.

II. The sure source of succ
in all our engagements with the enemy. W
the Israelites went forth to fight, the pries
was to declare, as it were, at the head of the
armies," Hear, O Israel, ye approach this da
unto the battle against your enemies; let n
your hearts faint, fear not, and do not trem
neither be ye terrified because of them; For t
Lord your God is He that goeth with you, to
fight for you, against your enemies, to save
you." David also, could elsewhere exclaim, "T
Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is
our Refuge."

In olden times, the ark
of the Covenant was the visible symbol of the
presence of God - and we often read of the mighty
victories thus gained for God's ancient people. -
When they went to besiege Jericho, the ark went
with them, - this animated and encouraged
them to victory - for without striking a blow,
the walls of Jericho fell down — but again,
we read that Hophni and Phineas, the sons of
Eli took the ark forth with their armies, but
were woefully beaten - these two disobedient sons
being slain and the ark itself taken, because it
had been carried, and the people were led on by
wicked rulers. But as a general thing when
the ark moved into the camp of the enemy,
victory was the result.

What was it, dear brethren,
that gave success to our forefathers in the

What gave such a glorious victory to that little t
of patriots against the mighty influence and
brought to bear by the British army and nation
cannot for a moment hesitate to give the praise
benign Providence - God fought for us and u
us then.- In a holy cause, led on by Christian so
they fought for their homes- their country- their
liberty- and their all. What then, will give su
to our arms, in the present struggle? Says the
Psalmist, "Some trust in chariots, and some i
horses: but we will remember the Name of t
Lord our God. They are brought down and falle
but we are risen and stand upright." (Ps. 20: 7+8)

The presence of favor of o
Heavenly Father is sufficient, whether we figh
with many or with a few.- It matters not hou
many be against us, if he alone is with us - he
alone is the author and giver of all victory.

In Conclusion:— What
should be our duty in the present circumstance
of trouble? Trust and Pray - The dealings
of God with our country - and ourselves, are they
not sufficient to draw forth an unbounded con-
fidence on our part? Our fathers trusted in Him
and were not confounded, nor brought to shame
Dear brethren, who has not thought of that won-
derful Providence which gave us such men as
those in power during our past national troub
as if to meet the exigencies of the occasion (Mo
decdi to Esther - "Who knoweth whether thou art
come to the kingdom for such a time as
this?- Esther 4: 14 vs.) Who does not recognize an
over-ruling hand, in the fact that when all
our arms and means of defence were well-nig

gone, an abundant and overwhelming supp
if by magic, were thrown upon us - and
has not seen the wonderful working of God
causing such an immense number of our fr
and brethren, coming forth and volunteering
fend our beloved flag and our dearly purchase
liberty? What made this unity which nou
vails among those whom but a few months ag
were ranked against each other in political c
bat? Such a marked fact has never occurred
fore in the history of our country - Do you not s
the hand of God in all these things? Trust Hi
Oh! trust Him with all your hearts - and sho
your confidence by

2. Prayer - This made Washington - this ma
Havelock - this made Hedley Vicars what they
were. And what may we expect from the Pres
dent, who asks the prayers of his countrymen?
Will you deny him and them your prayers? We
cannot all go forth to the fight - we may not
all be able to contribute money or means, but
we can all pray - for ourselves - for our rulers
for those who have gone out to fight in our stea
and O! dear brethren, forget not to pray for
your misguided brethren - your enemies -
Pray for peace - and happiness - truth an
justice - religion and piety -